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PROCEEDINGS
OF
THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY
OF LONDON.

SESSION 1859-60.

Thirteenth Meeting, June 11th, 1860.

LORD ASHBURTON, PRESIDENT, in the Chair.

PRESENTATIONS.—*Bernard Dietz ; Edward M. Elderton ; and Robert Rintoul, Esqrs., were presented upon their Election.*

ELECTIONS.—*The Bishop of Labuan ; the Rev. R. Miles ; the Rev. J. J. Stewart Perowne ; Professor H. D. Rogers ; Lord Seymour ; the Earl of Southesk ; Commander F. H. Stirling, R.N. ; Lord Stratheden ; James Brown, M.P. ; C. J. Bunyon ; W. H. Cooke ; M. E. Grant Duff, M.P. ; George Eliot, C.E. ; Thomas Fox, M.D. ; F. Haworth ; Hamilton Hume ; Brinsley Nixon ; Arthur Paget ; and Arthur Giles Puller, Esqrs., were elected Fellows.*

The Papers read were—

1. *Boat Excursion from Bangkok to Pecha-buri ; and 2. General Report on the Trade of Siam.* By Sir R. H. SCHOMBURGK, Corresponding F.R.G.S., Her Majesty's Consul in Siam.

1st. SIR R. SCHOMBURGK having suffered from indisposition during a lengthened stay at the consulate in Siam, resolved to make an excursion to the town of Pecha-buri, and furnishes in the present paper a graphic narrative of the expedition. He made his way in his barge through canals, until he reached the sea at the town of Meklong, and thence he coasted in her round to the mouth of the Pecha-buri River. There were many signs of industry along the banks which he ascended,—fish-curing, lime-burning, salt stores, and numerous flower-gardens. He was received with hospitality by the Governor of Pecha-buri, who showed him some native entertainments, and among others a bull-race—the bulls being attached to carts. He says the structure of the racing-cart is strikingly similar to the one represented in the bas-reliefs of the remains of Nineveh in Layard's 'Popular Account of the Discoveries

of Nineveh.' The bulls are harnessed to the end of the pole, they are guided by reins drawn through the nostril, and the drivers stand upright with remarkable steadiness. The enthusiasm of the people at these races was immense. There are numerous cave temples at Pecha-buri well worth visiting, though not of an equal scale to that of Ellora.

2nd. It must be observed that, with the exception of the Gulf of Siam, of which the greater portion has been recently surveyed under the able direction of Mr. J. Richards, of Her Majesty's surveying-ship *Saracen*, the position of places in the interior rests upon no fixed data, and the existing maps of Siam are very erroneous, in many respects having been projected merely upon conjecture.

The geographical position of this country is of great importance in a political respect, as it occupies the centre of India beyond the Brahmaputra, bordered on its immediate eastern frontier by Cochin China, and beyond that country by the Celestial Empire or China.

Taking into consideration its western limits, Siam Proper is bounded by the territories of a number of petty princes, who aim at independence, but cannot maintain it without paying some kind of tribute to the Kings of Siam, thereby acknowledging their sovereignty.

This refers principally to the Malayan peninsula, under which name I understand that strip of land extending from the British Tenasserim provinces to the point of Romania, bordered on the west by the Bay of Bengal, and on the east by the Gulf of Siam. This isthmus has near its base—namely, between Banlam in the Siamese Gulf and Tavoy Point at the Bay of Bengal—a breadth of 117 miles, and at its narrowest point scarcely 50 miles.

One of these narrow necks, between the river Xumphon or Champon and the Pak Chan at the Bay of Bengal, has been proposed for piercing a canal from that Bay to the Gulf of Siam, thus avoiding the great circuit of vessels bound from the principal ports of our Eastern empire to China; moreover thereby steering clear of the great dangers which the passage through the Straits of Malacca offers to vessels coming either from Calcutta and Bombay, or from Europe, bound for China.

The construction of a canal, deep enough for ships, through the Isthmus of Kra, as this neck of land is called, seems to offer no great difficulties, according to the information which I have received from His Excellency the Kalahome or Prince-Minister of Siam, who recently has visited the locality. His Excellency has, I fear, given to me rather too favourable a description of the labour required to

construct a canal for sailing-vessels of a draught of 16 feet; so that without farther investigation it is not implicitly to be trusted.

The Gulf of Siam is destitute of fine harbours; the larger rivers are obstructed by sandy bars which prevent vessels of a greater draught than 13 feet to cross the same. This refers likewise to the Menam, the principal river of Siam, on the banks of which lies Bangkok, the capital of that kingdom.

The Menam possesses three outlets: the bar of the deepest branch has only a depth of 3 feet at low water; and as the tide at springs amounts to 10 feet, larger vessels of a deeper draught than $11\frac{1}{2}$ feet can scarcely venture to cross it.*

It is customary that ships bound for Bangkok to take in cargo proceed to that port, where they load to $11\frac{1}{2}$ feet, and return afterwards to the roadstead outside the bar, where they fill up.

The distance from the roadstead to the anchorage of Bangkok is, following the windings of the river, about 33 nautical miles. After the ship has passed the bar and has reached the mouth of the river, distinguished on its right or western bank by a small mount, the water deepens. About 3 miles higher up lies the town and port of Paknam, the seat of a governor. The place is fortified, and upon a sandbank which rises out of the water near the western or right bank of the river batteries and other fortifications have been erected.

The shores of the river Menam are fringed with forest-trees, and here and there a habitation surrounded with orchards. Behind that fringe there are sugar and rice fields, extending for a considerable distance inland.

About 6 miles above Paknam lies, on the right bank of the river, the settlement of Paklat; its inhabitants consisting principally of Peguans, who during the war between Siam and that country were led by the Siamese into captivity. The number of inhabitants of Paklat has been estimated at seven thousand.

Immediately above that settlement the river makes a great turn, describing almost a circle; the land being, at its shortest extent, not much more than half a mile in breadth, while following the course of the river it is about 10 miles. A canal, only deep enough for boats, passes from Paklat to the upper part of the bend or Upper Paklat, but the same has not been constructed through the narrowest neck.

This canal, on both its banks, is studded with houses, among

* The bar is composed of sand, soft on the southern side and hard on the northern. It has the form of a horse-shoe.

which are some pagodas or wats, remarkable for their extent and architecture.

The banks of the river on both its sides about half-a-mile beyond Paklat are occupied by some extensive fortifications, principally on the right bank. The fort on the left is of less importance, but attached to it is a strong beam, which can be thrown across the river to impede the passage of any hostile vessel.

The river itself offers from here, as high up as the Palaces of the Kings, sufficient depth for the largest ship, were it possible to overcome the difficulty at the bar: as great a depth as 13 fathoms are occasionally found in that distance.

Merchant-vessels anchor usually between the British Consulate and the First King's palace, in from 5 to 8 fathoms of water. As some mercantile establishments are situated on the left bank of the river below the Consulate, vessels may likewise be seen in that direction.

The river Meklong has been considered by some a branch of the Menam. This is, however, erroneous: although at its lower part, near its mouth, it is joined by an arm of the Menam. The soil along the Meklong is extremely fertile; producing rice, sugar, sesamum or til-seed, besides numerous fruit-trees bordering its banks.

A great number of the inhabitants who live at the lower part of the river occupy themselves with the preparation of salt, which they obtain by evaporation. Not only is a great part of Siam supplied from here with this article, but a large quantity is likewise exported.

The town of Meklong is some distance up the river, but it can only be reached in small boats.

Banlam may be called the seaport of the district of Pecha-buri; the town of that name, likewise called Phiphri, lies some distance up the river, but the latter is too shallow to admit of large vessels coming up as high as the town.

The province is fertile, and furnishes a large quantity of rice for export, which, in a great measure, is conveyed by coasting-vessels direct to the roadstead of Bangkok, and taken there on board of the foreign vessels at anchor.

Bangplasoi is at the eastern bight of the Gulf of Siam, and about 6 miles to the south of the river. Bangpatung has a tolerable good harbour for vessels of a moderate draught.

The Bangpatung flows through a fertile country, well cultivated. The produce of its banks is principally sent to Bangplasoi, a town

in which resides the governor of the district, and which numbers, according to the information which I received from that official, about 3500 inhabitants—of whom 2000 are Chinese. Its port, if such the anchorage can be called, is quite safe for craft of a small draught, but does not admit vessels of a larger description.

The eastern coast of the Gulf of Siam abounds in fish, and not only a large number of the inhabitants of Bangplasoi, but likewise those of the village of Anhin, about 9 miles to the south of the former, occupy themselves with catching and curing the fish, which they convey to Bangkok.

Between Anhin and Bangplasoi there are extensive rice-fields; the low ground, easily subjected to irrigation, being advantageous to the cultivation of that grain. Til-seed (*Sesamum indicum*) is likewise raised and sent to Bangkok.

The village of Anhin, in lat. 13° 21' N., long. 100° 55' E., is famed for its salubrity. The First King and his court spend here generally some time to enjoy the sea-air. Not only His Majesty, but likewise some of his ministers, possess houses in Anhin, and the King has given orders for building an extensive residence.

A sojourn at Anhin is principally recommended to those who suffer from dysentery or diarrhœa,—maladies to which foreigners, Europeans and Americans, residing in Bangkok, are much subjected, and which prove but too frequently fatal.*

About 11 miles to the south of Anhin commences a group of islands, to which the name of the “Dutch Islands” has been given. Kisi-chang is one of the largest of the group, possessing a fine harbour; to which, in the case of severe weather, the shipping at the roadstead of Bangkok retire for safety. The inhabitants cultivate yams, sweet potatoes, but principally maize or Indian corn.

The harbour of the island of Kisi-chang has been recommended as a naval station, affording complete shelter. A fine stream of fresh water, which falls into the bay, furnishes, moreover, the facilities for watering.

These islands are famed as the resort of the swallow which constructs the edible birds'-nests, which are considered such a great delicacy by the Chinese and likewise by European gourmands.

The swallow (*Hirundo esculenta*) builds these nests in caves formed in the limestone rocks of which these islands seem to consist. This calcareous formation is reported to contain rock-crystals, and Bishop Pallegoix, who visited Koh-sichiang, speaks in high praise of the

* I can attest from my own experience to the great benefit which I received, when suffering under dysenteric diarrhœa, from a sojourn at Anhin. The First King styles it a Sanatorium for white people.

beautiful marble which he found there "polished by the waves of the sea as brightly as if it had been done by the hand of man." *

Chantaburi is considered, among the ports of Siam, only second in commercial importance to Bangkok. The town itself is about 11 miles up the river, following its windings, and is the residence of a governor.

Siam claims sovereignty over Cambodia, and its king pays tribute to the Siamese Court. A similar claim is preferred by Cochin China.

The country is very fertile and of great commercial importance. It produces rice, pepper, sugar, and its forests yield spontaneously gamboge and other gums, ornamental woods, &c.

Kampot is the only sea-port of the territory.

Turning now to the harbours and anchorages of the western coast of the Gulf of Siam, or Malay Peninsula, they are very imperfectly known. It is to be regretted that a detailed survey and examination by Her Majesty's surveying-ship *Saracen* did not extend to that coast.

As I have already observed, the rivers of Siam are usually obstructed at their mouth by bars of sand, and the shore seems devoid of sufficient indentations to form secure ports for affording shelter to vessels of a larger draught than 5 feet during tempestuous weather.

The PRESIDENT observed that this country was of great interest to us, on account of the promising commercial relations which were in view, and also on account of the people, who seemed to take more kindly to the ways of civilization than the other inhabitants of that peninsula.

MR. J. CRAWFORD, F.R.G.S., said it was forty years since he was in Siam, and what he had written on the subject had been copied over and over again. Sir John Bowring had produced a much more recent work, abounding with excellent information. With respect to Sir Robert Schomburgk's communications, he was particularly pleased with the last paper that was read. Every word of it ought to be published. It contained sound and reliable information. He had been himself nearly over the whole ground, and he could vouch for the perfect accuracy of Sir Robert Schomburgk's information. Siam was a peculiar country, inhabited by a peculiar race of people. It extended from the boundaries of Bengal to the western boundaries of China. The people were less civilized than the Hindoos, and incomparably less civilized and less industrious than the Chinese: all of them, except a few, were in a state of very great barbarism, professing the Buddhist religion—the doctrine of the metempsychosis—hating to kill all animal life, except the life of man, which they did not particularly respect. The population was estimated at six millions, but among these six millions there were a million and a half of Chinese. It was an exceedingly fertile country, and productive of many useful articles. In touching upon the production of cotton, Sir Robert Schomburgk had hit upon

* 'Description du Royaume Thai ou Siam.' Par Mons'. Pallegoix, &c. Paris, 1854, vol. i. p. 69.

the very place where sea-island cotton might be produced—a far better cotton than we could get from Africa. The staple of the country was rice, which was exported in very large quantities to Singapore, and at the present moment to China, where, owing to existing disturbances, it was much needed. Another production was sugar, an article which was only introduced into the country about twenty years before his visit, but which was now quoted in the London 'Price Current.' Another article which the country produced was what was called in the Custom House returns "tea:" it was brought to this country in large quantities, and, after the oil was extracted, it formed a capital material for fattening cattle.

The PRESIDENT said no man was better able than Mr. Crawford to give information with respect to this country, and any words of his in approbation of the papers of Sir Robert Schomburgk must be entitled to consideration. Still, notwithstanding Mr. Crawford's low estimate of the civilization of the people, he ventured to think they were capable of improvement, for they were conscious of their defects, and quite ready to adopt our improved methods of cultivation. Moreover, the King was a man of considerable intellect, and was doing everything in his power both to extend trade and to develop the industry of his people.

MR. CRAWFORD said the two kings of Siam, when young men, were confined in a monastery, their elder brother (a natural son of the king, whom he had the honour to be presented to when he was in Siam) having usurped the throne. Upon his death, the nobility assembled and insisted upon the legitimate son being elected; but such was his affection for his brother, that he would only consent to reign on condition that his brother was elected along with him. It was the eldest who had so distinguished himself, and who made the treaty with Sir John Bowring. He understood our language perfectly, and wrote it very well. The American missionaries, led by Dr. Judson, had converted forty thousand of the Siamese to Christianity: a greater number than in the course of a hundred years we had been able to convert in India or China. The territory which had been ceded to us, and was at the time thought to be a bad bargain, had turned out to be quite the reverse; and at this moment it was, he thought, one of the most prosperous portions of the British empire.

CAPTAIN SHERARD OSBORN, R.N., F.R.G.S., said, that ever since Major Yule's remarkable paper on Burmah, in 1857, he had felt an interest in the question of finding access to the western states of China by the group of rivers that come down from the north-west shoulder of the Tibetan range, the Mekong, the Menam, and the Salwin. They all took their rise in the province of Yunan, in Western China, a province as extensive as Spain. He approached it within 600 miles, when he ascended the Yang-tse-Kiang. Its products were abundant, and some of the finest teas in China were produced there. It was described by the Chinese as an elevated plain, bounded on the north by the great mountains of Tibet, which rise into the Snowy range. Through this great plain ran three different rivers, separated from each other by spurs of mountains. The Mekong, which was decidedly the most important of the three, no doubt, split the province of Yunan into two, and ran directly south from it. The mouth of this river is now in possession of the French. He fancied that by these rivers we might obtain communication with the western provinces of China, and he had no doubt if this Society were to point out to travellers and missionaries the importance which would attach to the opening up of this communication, in a commercial and geographical sense, and it were set before them as a specific object, that before long we should succeed in reaching the western provinces of China by that route.

COLONEL W. H. SYKES, F.R.G.S., said he believed there was already a communication between Siam and the western provinces of China, for the people

of Aracan got their opium from Yunan. It only required to extend that communication, as Captain Osborn suggested, in order to get the most profitable results. With respect to the King of Siam, Mr. Crawford had not done full justice to his acquirements. He was also a good Latin scholar, signing his name with Latin terminations; and the cards which he sent out quite rivalled any bridal cards he had ever seen.

MR. LAURENCE OLIPHANT, F.R.G.S., stated that Brigadier M'Leod had crossed from Moulmein into Yunan, with the object of diverting, if possible, a portion of the trade, which found its way down the Menam, to our settlements in the Bay of Bengal. The allusion in the paper to the bars at the mouths of these rivers was very important. The principal of these rivers was the Mekong, and the flag-lieutenant of the French admiral had informed him that it was the only river which he knew of in that part of the world, where there was no bar, and that there was twenty-eight feet of water on it. The importance, therefore, of that river was very evident.

The third Paper read was—

3. *Geographical Observations on Western Africa.* By DR. DELANY
and MR. R. CAMPBELL (Gentlemen of Colour).

DR. HODGKIN introducing these gentlemen observed, that the writings of Livingstone, whom this Society has so warmly supported, became known to the coloured people of America. They longed for the regions which he had described, and a company of free Negroes on the American soil wrote a letter to Dr. Shaw, dated Maddison, Wisconsin, May, 1858. That letter was placed in my hands, as one of your secretaries, to answer. I endeavoured to give the best information in my power in reply to the several points contained in it. The result was, that one coloured man, J. Mayers, went, at his own charge, with his son to the Cape, coming to England by the way, when I saw and advised with him. He has written to me from the Cape, and from Natal, and is now in the United States.

Two other coloured gentlemen of enterprise—a second Caleb and Joshua, it may be—went to the western coast of Africa, towards the headwaters of the Niger. The one, Dr. Delany, went to Liberia, on his way to Lagos; the other, R. Campbell, came to England; and through the benevolent aid of one of the Fellows of this Society, H. Christy, and of some others of our countrymen, found means to equip and go to Lagos, where the travellers met, and commenced the journey which they will presently describe.

I have only to add, that though the company of free American coloured persons looked to England almost exclusively, they have been aided by benevolent persons in America, and a society has been formed there, of which the secretary and agent, T. Bowren, is now in this country and attending your meeting, watching the interest which his coloured friends will excite as earnestly as would his English father have done were he alive and still carrying on his advocacy in favour of the sons of Africa.

DR. DELANY'S travels in Africa commenced at Grand Cape Mount, Liberia, where he visited every settlement except Carysburg, and traversing in part Stockton Creek, the Messurodo, St. Paul, Junk, and Kavalla rivers, to Cape Palmas, and from thence coasting to Lagos in the Bight of Benin.

From Lagos, by the Ogun river, he reached Abeokuta, and thence